

Programs that Promote Success

A central theme of the Task Force has been to “improve quality and reduce costs.” In concert with its mission, the Task Force recognizes the urgency of reframing our existing political, organizational and cultural values and beliefs that historically have encouraged an isolated, separatist, “add-on” view of special education. All students would benefit from a vision of special education as a service, one of many to meet the unique needs of our children. Our new view of special education should be as an independent part of the greater whole of general education, an element of a clearly defined, coherent, recursive and rich delivery system where all stakeholders are held accountable for results. Examples of practices in such a system include the following:

- Hiring and retaining high-quality content-area teachers;
- Implementing high-quality instruction;
- Implementing multi-tiered systems of support;
- Basing curriculum development and alignment on the principles of universal design;
- Creating communities of practice that focus on the development and improvement of persuasive negotiation skills;
- Establishing practices that promote a climate and culture of trust among stakeholders, and
- Implementing professional development that embraces collaboration and the critical importance of strong literacy instruction.

Inclusionary Practices A cornerstone for improving quality and reducing costs is strengthening the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to implement, monitor and evaluate inclusionary practices. In addition, proper training in conflict resolution, consultancy models and IEP facilitation practices will reduce disputes and the associated monetary and psychological costs.

McColl and Meier (2013) observed the evolving changes in requirements and the recent shifts in the law that are consistent with this renewed emphasis on accountability.

In 1997, IDEA⁸ required special education teachers to meet state licensure requirements, but there were no federal requirements related to demonstrating competency in the core content areas. In the most recent reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress required that teachers certified in special education demonstrate competency in core academic subjects (20 U.S.C. § 1401; 20 U.S.C. § 7801 (11) (NCLB, 2002)). This shifted the federal agenda by emphasizing accountability for meeting state standards in tested subjects through improving teacher quality and requiring the use of scientifically based research methods.

⁸ IDEA, 1997: Supporting high quality, intensive professional development for all personnel who work with such children in order to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to enable them – (i) To meet developmental goals, and to the maximum extent possible, those challenging expectations that have been established for all children; and (ii) To be prepared to lead productive, independent, adult lives, to the maximum extent possible.

This shift toward teacher accountability, outcomes and the use of scientifically based practices is reflected in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA.⁹

Thus, NCLB (2002) and the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA are significant in making special education programs consistent with the overall education reform agenda. For students with disabilities to perform well on state tests, they must have access to the same quality of instruction in the core academic subjects by having highly qualified teachers who use scientifically based practices (McColl and Meier, p.20).

The 2004 reauthorization also mandates a new process which allows parents the opportunity for voluntary dispute resolution prior to costly mediation or due process hearings. Parents can now lodge a complaint for investigation by the NJDOE on any aspect of the IEP, including related services and placement (IDEA, 2004). This process can be effective when the school is not in compliance with the IEP. In addition, the changes in law provide for alternative methods for evaluating learning disabilities, the implementation of a response to intervention framework and universal design for learning. This language now offers states the ability to reexamine effective practices in both general and special education with cost-effectiveness in mind.

Both NCLB and IDEA 2004 and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards address closing achievement gaps, underscore the importance of high quality, scientifically based instruction and interventions, and hold schools accountable for the progress of all students in meeting the same grade-level standards.

⁹ IDEA, 2004: Supporting high quality, intensive preservice preparation and professional development for all personnel who work with children with disabilities in order to ensure that such personnel have the skills and knowledge necessary to improve the academic achievement and functional performance of children with disabilities, including the use of scientifically based instructional practices, to the maximum extent possible.